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**DIVERSITY IN THE MILITARY:
HOW FAR SHOULD WE GO IN PURSUING A DIVERSE FORCE?**

by

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Preface

I am intrigued by the prospect of researching and writing on the topic of diversity. To some diversity is a frustrating topic that they are tired of hearing about. To others, it is a pivotal issue that demands our serious attention. I am frankly somewhere in the middle, not really sure what to think about the issues involved in a discussion of diversity. My hope is to study the issue, look at case studies, and hopefully develop some useful thoughts on what the military should do with the issue.

Abstract

The United States' journey toward equal rights for all (in terms of gender, race, religion, etc.) has long been a source of political and social discord. Some would argue that we have arrived, the playing field is now level, and we need to get over it. Others would argue we still have a long way to go, and we need to make amends for inequities of the past. The problem lies in trying to find the proper middle ground. Most would agree a diverse working group is good for an organization. The disagreement lies in how far we go in attempting to foster this diversity.

This study seeks to analyze the topic of diversity by using various case studies. Examples are provided of blatant discrimination, highlighting the need for diversity initiatives. The possibility of excessive focus on diversity is also explored, with accompanying examples. In the final analysis, there is no magic solution. Our focus must be in the areas of education and leadership. We must celebrate diversity, but not make that celebration a distraction, rather than an enhancement.

Part 1

What is Diversity?

Today, diversity has become somewhat of a popular buzzword. The word's ancestry can be traced to the women's equal rights movement and the civil rights struggle of African-Americans. While the feminist agenda and civil rights struggle can dredge up painful and divisive thoughts for some, diversity seems to be a less threatening ideal that has been embraced by popular culture and industry. Or has it?

Defining Diversity

The logical place to start looking for a definition is the dictionary. Webster defines diversity as "the condition of being different or having differences."¹ Unfortunately, that brings little more to the discussion than "different stuff." To get closer to the heart of the issue, it would probably be beneficial to go to a "doctor of diversity." Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., founder and president of the American Institute for Managing Diversity, states "Diversity refers to any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities."² That definition sounds better, but really doesn't go much further than Webster does with the basic dictionary definition.

The Air Education and Training Command (AETC) diversity initiative defines diversity as "A mixture of attributes shaped by cultural backgrounds and life experiences with varying values, goals and needs that each person possesses."³ While this goes

further by including the idea of cultural backgrounds and life experiences, it still seems to miss the original issue of overcoming inequities of the past. Preventing discrimination of minorities and women is supposed to be the heart of the matter. Are the AETC and similar definitions dancing around the central issue? Is the analysis of the 'definition' being too picky? It seems that everyone agrees that these broad definitions are appropriate.

Limits on Definitions

The semantics over defining diversity may seem excessive, but the definition is critical. Too broad a definition dilutes the purpose of a diversity program. Yet, recognizing "everyone's" differences simply overlooks the reality and plays down the need for diversity programs, which spring from injustices of the past and the present as well.

Diversity Too Broadly Defined

In an essay on the value of diversity in the Navy, Senior Chief Yeoman Mike Tainter, U.S. Navy (retired) highlights the need for all points of view by pointing out that "Sailors in aviation fields have values and points of view that differ from those of sailors in surface warfare."⁴ Certainly those of differing backgrounds can bring different and valuable points of view to a situation. This, however, is common sense, and just clouds the need for 'real' dialogue on diversity. Everyone in the Air Force knows that F-15 pilots are different, but a diversity program is not required to verify that point. Intuitively everybody simply steers clear of them at the bar!

Recognizing "all" differences, trivializes the genuine need for a diversity program. Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans have a rich history, AND faced serious discrimination in our nation's past. Should we appreciate what a person of Irish descent brings to our organization? Absolutely. Do we need to include this in our diversity program? Maybe not.

A study conducted by the American Management Association offered the top ten "worst practices" with regard to diversity programs. They considered the #1 worst practice to be "broadening the focus of diversity to include all individual differences," and ignoring the substantive issues. Their study found:

"The program which defined diversity as 'those differences unique to every individual,' backfired. Despite considerable investment in the change effort, white women and people of color were angrier than ever. 'The company just won't deal with the real issues,' they complained."⁵

Consider, for example, the issue of religion. Our Nation's history includes significant strife and discrimination between Protestants and Catholics. This, however, is not readily visible in today's workplace. What we are more likely to see today are problems with the understanding and treatment of Muslims. This is not to suggest that we mandate the teaching of Islam. The point is that in creating a definition of the issue, it should not be diluted to the extent that the definition misses its intended purpose.

Diversity Too Narrowly Defined

While too broad a definition of diversity can be offensive to disadvantaged minorities, too narrow a definition can tire and irritate others. If white men are harangued year after year about their treatment of women and minorities, they may build up resentment to the training. Diversity training could become something that has to be painfully endured each year, similar to a dental appointment or the physical fitness test.

Additionally, if the training is focused on how the majority should treat minorities, we can quickly find ourselves chasing statistics. A book by the Strategic Studies Institute which includes studies on population diversity and the U.S. Army ponders this question. Its editor, Col Lloyd J. Matthews, U.S. Army (retired), offers that "...an epoch defining demographics ferment is in progress in the United States today, that this ferment will produce fundamental changes in the composition of the Army, and that the Army must adapt to such changes with great wisdom..."⁶ In laymen's terms, this means we need to keep our eye on population changes. The Census Bureau reports:

- The black population will more than double by the year 2050
- The white share of the U.S. population (non-Hispanic) will fall from 74% in 1995 to 53% in 2050.
- The non-Hispanic white population will constitute less than half of the U.S. population under age 18 by 2030.⁷

If a diversity program is built around a too narrowly focused definition of diversity, it could find itself in the junkyard of failed programs. In conclusion, with respect to defining what diversity is, a broad diversity definition is necessary, as long as the program is tailored to respond to current needs.

Notes

¹ Philip Babcock Grove, Ph. D., ed., *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1993) 663.

² Senior Chief Yeoman Mike Tainter, "There's Value in Diversity," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 124, no. 2 (February 1998): 38.

³ Air Education and Training Command Diversity Initiative Study, 1999.

⁴ Yeoman, 39.

⁵ Delyte D. Frost, "Review Worst Diversity Practices To Learn from Others' Mistakes," *HR Focus* 76, no. 3 (April 99): 11.

⁶ Lloyd J. Matthews, "Introduction: Primer on Future Recruit Diversity," in *Population Diversity and the U.S. Army*, ed. Lloyd J Matthews (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, June, 1999), 1.

Notes

⁷ Joseph C. Jones, "Diversity in the 21st Century Army: Leadership Issues," in *Population Diversity and the U.S. Army*, ed. Lloyd J Matthews (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, June, 1999), 58.

Part 2

Is Diversity a Good Thing?

Yes, diversity is a good thing, but only if it is pursued with reason and consistency.

As one Marine Company Executive Officer put it:

So what is the goal here? Do we want a Corps of best qualified officers who, because this is America, will naturally reflect a mixture of cultures and social experiences, or do we want an OCS platoon photo that looks like a UNICEF poster? If all we are going for is an aesthetic patchwork of color to show the world how diverse we are, then why don't we just line up each graduating platoon at OCS and spray paint 12% of them black, 12% of them tan, and 5% of them a mixture of red, yellow, and green?¹

While perhaps a rather cynical observation, it makes light of the fact that while diversity is a good thing, it loses its purpose if diversity is pursued only for diversity's sake. An analysis of private industry and the military provide a good demonstration of the value of diversity.

The Benefits of Diversity Proven in Private Industry

Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr. states "Increasingly, companies are beginning to look at representation as a business issue, as opposed to a legal compliance issue, a moral issue, or a social responsibility issue."² High-minded altruistic motives may have sparked many diversity initiatives, but these initiatives are now being leveraged as a business strategy. Allstate Insurance Co. is a classic example. Joan Crockett, Senior Vice President for Human Resources, stresses "the company's diversity initiative isn't a nice-

to-do, social conscience program,” but is “a compelling business strategy.”³ Phil Lawson, Vice President of Sales says, “Being in a relationship business, how can you not look like and sound like your clients? It’s an obvious competitive advantage when you can mirror the clients that you serve.”⁴ This goes hand-in-hand with Allstate’s aspirations to expand its Hispanic customer base.

Research shows there are other indirect benefits to the bottom line when a company has strong diversity and human relations policies. In a survey of more than 1,000 organizations, such practices “contributed to lower turnover and to higher productivity, which in turn contributed to increased firm performance.”⁵ Additionally, a study of Standard and Poors 500 organizations by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) found that “organizations ranked in the top fifth in terms of compliance with regulatory requirements enjoyed an average stock return of 18.3%, whereas organizations in the lower fifth experienced an average stock return of 7.9%.”⁶ Included in that report was the following, “The 20% of organizations rated highest for hiring women and people of color outperformed the stock market by 2.4 percentage points from 1988 through 1992, whereas the worst 20% trailed by eight points.”⁷ Although it is difficult to draw a direct causal link in these figures to prove that diversity improves the bottom line, it certainly doesn’t hurt.

A final note from industry is the power of sound diversity practices to draw talent into a company. Raffa & Associates, one of the largest independent accounting firms in Washington, D.C., has been honored for its hiring and employment practices, and supporting national civil rights and humanitarian endeavors. In the Journal of Accountancy, the story is related of Kim Robertson who was close to making partner at

one of Raffa & Associates' competitors. "I wasn't looking for a new job" she said, "but I was immediately attracted by the cultural diversity of the people at Raffa."⁸

Translating These Benefits to the Military

It can be argued then that in private industry, sound diversity practices can lead to an increased and more diversified clientele, an improvement in the monetary bottom line, and an increase in the quality of candidates for employment. As mentioned earlier, while these assertions are difficult to scientifically prove, in a causal way, they are none-the-less compelling. This can be difficult to relate to the military, however, considering our function of killing people and breaking things. A laser-guided bomb does not care whether the thumb that releases it is that of a black or white fighter pilot. The terms "bottom line" and "clientele" are difficult to transcribe from Allstate and S&P 500 firms into military parlance, but that is no excuse to ignore their progress.

Ironically, some have voiced their concern that the military is too diverse. Col Matthews reports that:

"Complaints were registered in both the Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars that poor blacks bore a disproportionate share of the combat risks. African-American leaders Jesse Jackson and Benjamin Hooks, for example, protested that the U.S. Army forces sent to the Gulf were 30 percent black, whereas the U.S. population was only 11 percent black. After the Gulf War, Professor Ronald Walters of the Howard University faculty recommended binding quotas limiting blacks in the military to their proportion of the population at large."⁹

This is an extreme concept, but the reality is that a diverse population is here to stay. America is the classic melting pot. This trait or characteristic has helped make the USA the greatest nation on earth.

A final thought on the benefits of diversity to the military concerns our example to the rest of the world. American military forces are increasingly being used around the world in a non-lethal role. Some have likened it to a large meals-on-wheels program, others have expressed more cynical views. The important point, however, is our effective assimilation of diverse peoples is a great strength. Our credibility in the peacekeeping roles is enhanced by our multi-racial, multi-ethnic composition that sets an example for other countries.

Notes

¹ Capt Sasha Sabet, "Should Race Be a Factor?" *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 1 (January 1999): 55.

² Louisa Wah, "Diversity at Allstate," *Management Review* 88, no. 7 (July/August 1999): 24.

³ *Ibid*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid*, 25.

⁵ Jacqueline A. Gilbert, "Stigmatization Revisited," *Group & Organization Management* 24, no. 2 (June 1999): 240.

⁶ *Ibid*, 240.

⁷ *Ibid*, 240.

⁸ Catherine L. Carlozzi, "Diversity is Good for Business," *Journal of Accountancy* 188, no. 3 (September 1999): 85.

⁹ Matthews, 4.

Part 3

Do We NEED to Do Something About Diversity?

Having established diversity to be a good thing, a decision needs to be made on whether or not something needs to be done about it. It would be marvelous if we did not need to do something about diversity, but the reality of today's world and the humans in it requires active measures.

The Ideal World

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of a day when men would be judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. If that were true today, we would not need any diversity programs. All organizations would naturally reflect the diversity of our society. Unfortunately Dr. King was assassinated, and his dream remains just a dream. Further, Dr. King's dream is tarnished when the "majority" use his words to argue that in being colorblind we should do nothing. Dr. King did not dream of a day when we ignore race, he dreamed of a day when race would not matter.

Wrestling with Dr. King's dream can set up somewhat of a Catch-22 dilemma for leaders. On the one hand we do not want race and gender to be issues, but on the other hand there are inequities demanding attention. Yes, America has a beautiful history as a melting pot, and there have been struggles along the way, but it is not such as it ought to be. It was only 30-40 years ago when African-Americans were in the depths of their

struggle for civil rights. In an ideal world, those days would be ancient history, sadly they are not.

The Real World

Unfortunately, racist and bigoted attitudes are not gone from our country. Not only do these attitudes exist today, but there are startling examples of instances that they are institutional.

Texaco

In November 1996, Texaco settled a racial discrimination lawsuit filed by some of the company's African-American employees. The price tag was steep! The company had to pay \$175 million.¹ Some ask if this was just a case of lawyers running amok with a cooperative judge and jury. It was not. Texaco settled because they were embarrassingly caught red-handed, on both audio and videotape.

One company executive secretly tape recorded "a dicey discussion among company executives that included racist language and talk of destroying key evidence."² On these tapes, Texaco's executives made fun of Kwanzaa, and used racial slurs that included the "n" word.³ Another example was a white employee caught on videotape stopping outside the office of an African-American, lamenting "[expletive], I never thought I'd live to see the day when a black woman had an office at Texaco."⁴ These as well as other examples such as "hundreds of minority employees being paid less than the minimum salary for their job category" contributed to the finding of institutional racism at Texaco.⁵ The gravity of this case is more pronounced when one realizes that at the time, Texaco was the nation's 14th-largest corporation.

Other Examples

But Texaco is an isolated example, right? Wrong! Denny's, a major restaurant chain, settled a discrimination lawsuit for \$50 million. Shoney's, another restaurant chain, settled another lawsuit for \$30 million when two white managers claimed they were fired for refusing to discriminate against blacks. The Nashville Business Journal highlighted the fact the cost of these three examples alone exceeded a quarter of a billion dollars. Institutional racism, combined with the countless examples of individual racism, can not be ignored.

Application

The question before us is whether we NEED to do something about diversity. The answer is yes. We can not try to pretend the examples reported here are isolated incidents. One commentator noted "The only thing different about Texaco was that a tape recorder was in the room...Texaco got caught."⁶

Looking back, Texaco CEO Peter Bijur likened diversity training to a situation of "you can pay now or pay later."⁷ Texaco, to the tune of \$175 million, decided to pay later. There is, however, a good ending to the Texaco incident. Fortune magazine writes that "Texaco hasn't quite overcome its image as the embodiment of corporate racism. Yet thanks to management's decisive actions—and court mandated oversight—the oil giant is nearly a model for diversity."⁸ Texaco's turnaround is so remarkable that they were nearly included on Fortune's 199 list of America's Best Companies for Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics.⁹ One diversity expert noted that "I have never seen a company be so creative and so dedicated to change...they are absolutely a model for how to approach one of the biggest problems facing this country."¹⁰

Enough talk about Texaco and private industry! How does the military compare? While in our recent past the military may not be guilty of institutional racism, we would be kidding ourselves to think that similar attitudes do not exist in uniform. We may not be writing \$175 million dollar checks, but we may be suffering one dollar at a time by a lack of cohesion and productivity. While again this is a difficult causal link to prove, we need to act!

Notes

¹ Kenneth Labich, "No More Crude At Texaco," *Fortune* 140, no. 5 (6 September 1999): 205.

² *Ibid*, 205.

³ Shari Caudron, "Don't Make Texaco's \$175 Million Mistake," *Workforce* 76, no. 3 (March 1997): 58.

⁴ Labich, 205.

⁵ *Ibid*, 205.

⁶ Caudron, 59.

⁷ Labich, 207.

⁸ *Ibid*, 205.

⁹ *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 206.

Part 4

What to do?

The question of what to do boils this paper down to the meat of the mission. Unfortunately with a social issue such as this, there is no "right answer." Some white males might be annoyed with one approach, while others with another. Some minorities and women might be offended no matter what we do. Regardless, diversity will likely continue to be a divisive issue. Lingering attitudes such as those at Texaco make it clear we can not ignore the issues of gender, race and ethnicity.

Approaches to Avoid

While often well intended, there have been approaches to this issue that have ranged from silly to downright harmful. While trying to answer the question of what to do, we first need to determine what not to do.

Poor Implementation and Motivation

A large Chicago-based printing company found itself in the throes of a large racial discrimination lawsuit. Ironically, this lawsuit did not target a lack of diversity or diversity training, but rather on the content of the diversity program. As a part of this diversity program, a black worker was forced to "endure" a movie showing graphic portrayings of lynchings in the "Old" South. Additionally, responses were required to such statements as "It is a fairly well

established fact that blacks have a less pleasant body odor than white people,” and “One of the main characteristics of Puerto Ricans in the United States is their sexual looseness and immorality.”¹ Such movies and discussion questions were intended for white employees. They were designed for them to deal with their alleged racism. These may seem like extreme examples, but they highlight the fact that a bad diversity program can be more harmful than no program at all.

There is a danger when a diversity program is implemented because of the wrong motivation. Too many diversity programs are knee jerk reactions that are not well designed. When the purpose of a diversity initiative is to simply “stiff arm” a lawsuit, then it will likely fail.

Finally, diversity initiatives are less effective when they are implemented with an “us versus them” connotation. The stereotypical diversity training instructor is either a minority, a woman, or likely both. At times, the training can take on somewhat of a guilt driven instructional tone. It can be perceived as the instructor telling “us” how to treat “them.” An “us versus them mentality” defeats the purpose of a diversity program. Some elements of a guilt driven instructional tone may be appropriate, but too much sours and negates the experience. A lecture on behavior is not as effective as a discussion of the benefits of a diverse work force. Determining the right balance relates to the discussion on defining diversity too broadly or too narrowly. Too broad a focus dilutes the intent, while too narrow a focus reinforces feelings of resentment and divisiveness.

Diversity for Diversity’s Sake

The Hooters restaurant chain, well known for its attractive and “uniquely” clad waitresses was targeted by the EEOC, even before a discrimination suit was filed. The chain told the EEOC

to “get lost,” and fought back with ridicule. The government demanded that Hooters contribute \$22 million to a fund for the male “victims’ of its hiring practices, and institute training for its employees on “how to be more sensitive to men’s needs.”² How did this end? Some lawyers made a good deal of money. Four years after the suit was filed, Hooters paid \$3.75 million for damages and in attorney’s fees. This is somewhat of an extreme example, but it vividly illustrates the potential folly in pursuing diversity simply for the sake of diversity.

What possible application could Hooter’s girls have to the military? It may seem like a drastic and offensive linkage to some, but consider the topic of assigning women to submarines. A study was commissioned in 1992, and again in 1995, to investigate the possibility of submarines being opened to women. These studies recommended against this idea, primarily due to the expense of reconfiguration. It was also determined that women would be “disruptive” to the environment.³ U.S Navy Captain Mark L. Dembert, a psychiatrist and former submarine medical officer, put it this way:

“Issues include physical limitations for certain ratings; habitability constraints; lack of privacy...billeting requirements...potential for sexual harassment; the effect on submariner families; and issues involving pregnancy...An environmentally encapsulated submarine crew with both men and women would present far too much of a psychologically complex environment for a submarine officer’s training and role as a commanding officer to manage.”⁴

The point here is not to rehash the argument of women on submarines. The point here is that there must be consideration given to a cost-benefit analysis. Women should not be put on submarines for the benefit of putting women on submarines. Not serving on submarines is not injurious to women. Putting them on submarines would simply be a situation of pursuing diversity for the sake of diversity.

Consider, for example, the plight of left-handed pilots. Fighter and trainer aircraft have the throttles on the left side of the cockpit, requiring the aircraft to be flown with the right hand. Is

this discriminatory against left-handed pilots? Perhaps, but it would not be worthwhile to have left handed aircraft and right-handed aircraft. It is a simple matter of a cost-benefit analysis.

While these may have been extreme examples, the point is that diversity cannot be pursued for the sake of diversity. This idea should not, however, be used as an excuse for any majority group to oppress a minority group. While we need to err on the side of furthering diversity, every situation needs to be considered with regard to cost versus benefits. Left unchecked, we could end up with “Hooter’s guys”, left-handed aircraft, and men and women bunking together in close quarters under the sea for six months at a pop.

Affirmative Action

Not many topics inspire such fierce debate as that of affirmative action. Some view it as a necessity for women and minorities to compete in the workforce, some believe it had its place in the past, but we need to move on, while others see it as a form of blatant discrimination in a zero-sum environment. A discussion of the political and social merits of affirmative action is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief look at some recent studies and military applications is appropriate. Consider the following studies chronicled in the *Journal of Group & Organization Management*:

“Empirical research has shown that women who perceived that they were hired as a result of affirmative action mandates suffered greater stress, experienced less job satisfaction, and selected less demanding work assignments (Chako, 1982; Heilman, 1994; Heilman, Rivero, & Brett, 1991) than did women who felt that their gender was not responsible for their hire. Although the original intent of affirmative action was to provide opportunities for qualified women and racial minorities, employers and even the courts in some instances have considered race and gender foremost in hiring decisions and in settlement of discrimination lawsuits. The affirmative action label has resulted in employers’ perceptions of incompetence for affirmative action hires (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992) as well as in negative self-perceptions for these individuals (Heilman, 1994; Heilman, Simon, & Repper, 1987). Negative reactions toward affirmative action are also apparent from several reverse discrimination suits—for example...”⁵

That passage reads like a lot of psycho-speak, but it demonstrates a trend in workplace studies that highlights a need to graduate from affirmative action.

Allstate was cited earlier in this paper as a positive example of progressive diversity measures, but have they gone too far? Joan Crockett, Senior Vice President for Human Resources, said that "If we don't have women [candidates], the next step is [to ask]'how do I develop female employees so they can be promoted? Or, we could go outside to hire women.'"⁶ If you read between the lines, that says to men that being the best at Allstate may not be good enough. All the benefits of a good diversity program can be destroyed if it becomes viewed as affirmative action in disguise.

Fortunately this type of affirmative action could not thrive in the military, right? Wrong. Each of the services has had lawsuits and other battles over promotion system guidance. The Air Force recently settled a \$10 million reverse discrimination lawsuit with 83 Colonels who were forcibly retired. The Air Force is now facing a class action suit filed by 1,595 potential plaintiffs who were given early separation by a 1993 board.⁷ At the heart of these lawsuits is that the boards were instructed to consider gender and race when making their decisions. Of the 1,595 officers given early separation by the 1993 board, none were women or minorities.⁸ Included in the guidance to these boards was direction from the Secretary of the Air Force that board members should be particularly sensitive to the records of women and minorities. Guidance now tells board members to be "particularly sensitive in your evaluation of all records."⁹ The Army recently settled a similar lawsuit with JAG officers who were passed over to promotion to Colonel. As a result, the Army is revamping its promotion board guidance, and the boards are being charged with "the Army is committed to unbiased consideration of officers for promotion.

You may not consider race, gender or ethnic background of an officer in the course of your review and selection of officers for promotion.”¹⁰

A firestorm of debate was touched off when the Marine Corps’ promotion guidance came under scrutiny. Among other things, it charged promotion boards that:

“...Minority officers may take a longer time to adjust and perform to the level of their contemporaries. This may result in initially lower fitness reports at the junior officer level (through captain O-3) and a higher percentage of “late bloomers” than other officers. You must not overlook these “late bloomers” when evaluating potential and in determining which eligible officers are best and fully qualified for selection.”¹¹

This sounds insulting towards minority officers, who by default may take a longer time to bloom. Additionally, it can only increase ill will throughout the ranks. Consider four hypothetical Marine Captains who are in the same division and up for promotion. Suppose one is a minority, one is a woman, and the other two are white males. If the two white males happen to be passed over, and the woman and minority officers are promoted, how will that look in light of the promotion board guidance? The two who were promoted may be fine officers, but the promotion board’s guidance will still cast a pall over the situation.

I was very recently in a unit that had eleven “mid-level managers” under one supervisor. The eleven managers were selected strictly by date of rank, with no consideration to qualifications. It just so happened that all eleven were white. It was announced that all eleven of these positions would turn over, and that the positions would now be chosen on merit. This was normal procedure, but the rub came in with the supervisor’s comments on the selection process. In a staff meeting he lamented the fact that the previous eleven had all been white. He vowed that in his selection process, women and minorities would be properly represented. Sure enough, when the eleven were announced, there was one African-American, one Asian, and one woman. These three may have been the cream of the crop and the absolute best qualified, but in light of

the supervisor's announced methodology everyone is left to wonder. What an unfortunate position for these three to be placed. The celebration of their appointment was darkened by the cloud of affirmative action.

Approaches Under Question

In attempting to answer the question of what to do, there is a gray zone between approaches to avoid and approaches to embrace. This gray zone centers on the issue of recruiting. Most feel that it is appropriate to target under represented groups for recruitment, while others consider it an extension of affirmative action. The Marine Corps faced the most public debate on this issue with regard to their "12-12-5" initiative. In 1994, Navy Secretary directed the Naval Services to "access minorities at the same rate as national distribution – 10 to 12 percent black, 10 to 12 percent Hispanic, and 4 to 5 percent other."¹² While 12-12-5 was only a goal, some saw it as simply a quota. Some argued that these "quotas" would dilute the quality of the officer corps, while others saw the value in the diversity brought to the Marine Corps.

The simple truth is that to achieve a diverse force, it must be done through aggressive recruitment of underrepresented groups. While attaching quota numbers to recruitment levels may not be a prudent approach, we must study the numbers to identify problem areas. One Marine officer put it this way, "...there is nothing wrong with targeting certain underrepresented racial or ethnic groups for recruitment purposes...however, once a person walks through the recruiter's door, then the 'targeting' should end."¹³

Central to the problem of officer recruitment is the fact that minorities do not graduate from college at a rate commensurate with their population percentage. BGen (retired) Alexander P. McMillan, formerly the director of Marine Corps Recruiting at HQMC, wrote of the difficulties he faced with finding minority recruits of the quality expected for OCS. He found "the

percentage of minorities in our major colleges is still too small to satisfy the needs of both industry and the military, [and that]...the number of blacks in minority colleges, with the requisite qualifications to meet Marine Corps standards, is still extremely small.” In fact, The Journal of Accountancy as recently as 1998 reported, “African-Americans received only 7.5% of the bachelor’s degrees, 6% of the master’s degrees and 3.8% of the doctorates awarded in 1995. With nationwide unemployment under 2% for all college graduates, competition for top degree holders from African-American, Hispanic, Native American and other minority backgrounds is fierce.”

We must aggressively recruit under represented groups, but how we go about that recruitment effort is very important. We need to avoid negative connotations such as the Marine Corps’ 12-12-5 program. Some claim that targeted recruitment efforts are a slippery slope to special treatment once minorities are recruited. We must separate the two. The courts have ruled against giving special consideration in promotion boards, which means recruitment is one of the few tools available to us in the pursuit of diversity.

Approaches to Embrace

What the military needs to embrace, with regard to pursuing diversity, can be addressed in two central themes of education and leadership. In the year 2000 the military is not guilty of “Texaco” type sins, and is a diversity success story to many. It can not, however, relax its efforts. Through education and leadership, the military can reap the benefits of diversity, while avoiding elements of divisiveness.

Education

One Marine Colonel calls for a stop to the celebration of things such as Hispanic Heritage Month. Were it not for the fact that Col Rocky J. Chavez is Hispanic, that could be considered racist. He contends "1) It is time for Hispanics to move more rapidly into the mainstream of U.S. society. 2) It is time to move beyond recognizing/segregating a particular culture. 3) It is time to recognize the numerous cultures that make up the mosaic of U.S. society."¹⁴ This is not to advocate joining Col. Chavez in his drive to end celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, but is to support his argument to keep diversity in perspective. We should all be proud of, and celebrate, our heritage, but we must not allow its focus to divide us into groups. We should certainly strive to understand each other's cultures, but we should stop short of shoving ethnic culture down each other's throats. Heritage in the military should be tastefully celebrated in the background, not paraded in the foreground. We should first be American soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines; not people segmented by where our ancestors were born.

Part of the education should be that diversity is a fact as well as a concept. It is a fact that our nation and our military are diverse. It is a concept that diversity is a good thing, and we need welcome and pursue it. We need to educate our people that we have moved beyond the divisive days of affirmative action, and are in the positive days of diversity. Jacqueline Gilbert, in an article entitled "Stigmatization Revisited" put it this way: "Although affirmative action and its consequences, in some cases, are negatively portrayed, the successor of affirmative action, diversity management, has been suggested a crucial element in organizational survival."¹⁵ We need to get this across in our diversity training. We need to move beyond the attitude of special treatment that went with affirmative action, to the ideal of equal treatment that is fostered with diversity training and management.

Leadership

When it comes to diversity training, leadership is critical. When it comes to leadership in this area, communication is essential. When the troops have to go across the base to something like the 'Social Actions Office' for a 'lecture' on diversity, the message can be missed. We need to insist that our leaders 'buy in' to the ideals of diversity, and have the message come from their lips and their actions. The good message of diversity training can be lost in the 'sterility' of a Social Actions Office. We need a security forces commander to convey the message to her troops. We need a fighter squadron commander to convey the message to his troops.

More so than preaching the message, our leaders need to live the message, and we need to hold them accountable to it. Allstate has instituted a measurement system to ensure that its program does not exist in name only. They use 360-degree feedback, and the results are tracked twice a year. From this they come up with diversity indexes and leadership indexes. While this may sound excessive, Allstate is clearly serious about diversity. Texaco sized problems are highly unlikely at Allstate. It can be debated as to whether these types of measures are appropriate for the military. Our ultimate goal is to be colorblind, and such formality could perpetuate the stigma. We do not need indexes, we need leadership, and we need it at all levels. From the Wing Commanders to the E-4 shop chiefs we need to stamp out ignorance, and the education needs to come from the horse's mouth.

Notes

¹ Seth Lubove, "Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't," *Forbes* 160, no. 13 (15 December 1997): 122.

² *Ibid*, 124.

³ David Brown, "Idea of Women on Subs Met with Varied Response," *Navy Times*, 21 June 1999.

⁴ Captain Mark L. Dembert, "Women Shouldn't Serve on Submarines," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 121, no. 8 (August 1995): 72.

⁵ Gilbert, 239.

Notes

⁶ Wah, 25.

⁷ Bryant Jordan, "Another Lawsuit Claims Reverse Discrimination," *Air Force Times* 27 September 1999.

⁸ Ibid, 20.

⁹ Ibid, 20.

¹⁰ Jim Tice, "Promotion Board Policies Under Fire: Army Settles Reverse Discrimination Lawsuit," *Army Times* 26 July 1999.

¹¹ Capt Robert A. Kurowski, "Undercurrents," *Marine Corps Gazette* 82, no. 10 (October 1998): 12.

¹² Ibid, 12.

¹³ Sabet, 55.

¹⁴ Col Rocky J. Chavez, "It Is Time to Stop Hispanic Heritage Month" *Marine Corps Gazette* 83, no. 1 (January 1999): 58.

¹⁵ Gilbert, 240.

Part 5

Conclusions

This paper spent a great deal of time on the “don’ts” of diversity. Unfortunately, that approach is required in today’s world. While it is conclusive that diversity is good, and we NEED to do something about it, the implementation is all too often misinterpreted. The diversity training needs to be properly motivated, and can not focus on diversity for diversity’s sake. Affirmative action sounds good in compassionate theory, but in the final analysis it simply perpetuates divisiveness and lifts one up at the expense of another.

What the military needs to embrace is education and leadership. These fundamentals sound simplistic, but are at the heart of the situation. With education we need to celebrate and sensitize, not browbeat. With leadership we need to set the example, not stigmatize. When our leadership fully buys in to the benefits of a diverse workforce, we can move one step further toward not needing diversity programs. Dr. King’s may have sounded Utopian, but if we give our next generation the leadership and education that they deserve, we are one step closer to realizing his dream.

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